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ABSTRACT

Use of ethnographic methods to assess learning and staff development needs for workplace adult education programs is discussed, focusing on the teacher's role as ethnographic researcher. Four stages of ethnographic research are identified: (1) open-ended, inductive study; (2) structured observation; (3) analysis; and (4) speculation and sharing of findings. Characteristics of the ethnographic researcher's approach and behavior are also noted. Two models of data collection are presented. The first, use of photography, is intended to create a record of the workplace, identify its technology status and needs, and create an image for later analysis and sharing. Tips for taking and analyzing photographs are noted. The second data collection method discussed is the use of interviews. Five kinds of interview questions are discussed: "grand tour" or overview; specific task- or area-related questions; asking for examples; eliciting experiences; and questions about use of job-related terminology. An interview form is included. Benefits of using these data collection methods are noted, and similarities and differences in workplace and adult basic education are outlined. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Teacher/Ethnographer in the Workplace: Approaches to Staff Development

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Mary Kay Gee

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I. Introductions

II. An overview of ethnography, stages, and tips

III. Two models of data collection
   - A. Photography
   - B. Interviewing

IV. Group work, practicing the two models

V. Debriefing - What did you discover?

VI. Questions and comments

1994-97 College of Lake County National Workplace Literacy Program

Mary Kay Gee and Charlotte Ullman

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WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

Ethnography is the study and systematic recording of human culture. An ethnography is an analytic description or reconstruction of a cultural scene or group (Spradley and McCurdy).

It is a form of qualitative research which includes descriptions of people, places, languages, events, and products. The data is collected by means of observation, interviewing, listening, and immersion with the least amount of distortion and bias.

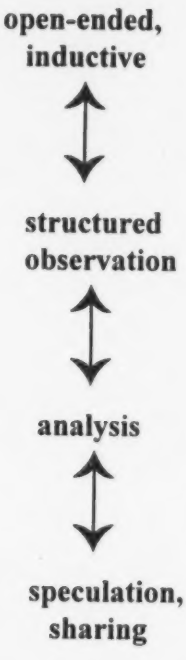
WHY USE ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE WORKPLACE?

- Teaching in the workplace is different from teaching in an adult education program
- Instructors are totally unfamiliar with the culture
- It enables instuctors to identify learning needs
- It involves *all* company personnel

GOAL

The goal of ethnography in the workplace is to understand the workplace from the insider's perspective. The data will then be synthesized, analyzed, and used to create an effective workplace educational program.

STAGES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH



A. <u>open-ended</u> , <u>inductive</u>
   1. determine what ideas,questions, concerns you would like to or need to research
   2. do NOT let first impressions guide your research; attempt to be scientific and responsible, continue for more knowledge and understanding

B. <u>structured observation</u>
   1. need to shift and narrow the focus
   2. determine methods for data collection: interactive and noninteractive
      interviews,photographs,focus groups,documents,meetings,surveys,readings,participant observations
   3. continually reexamine and refine

C. <u>analysis</u>
   1. take your work to conclusion:
      documentation record → new knowledge → new reality Structured recall
   2. study, plan, and implement action to be taken

D. <u>speculation and sharing</u>
   1. monitor and evaluate your work
   2. determine what needs to be shared with colleagues and the public: What can these 2 groups benefit from with your ethnographic findings? audience validation

TIPS FOR THE ETHNOGRAPHER IN THE WORKPLACE

1. Revel in your ignorance. Everyone knows that you didn't study aluminum processing in college. Practice being a student again.

2. Always tell the participant what you are doing, what you are trying to learn, and what you will do with the information.

3. Make your presence agreeable and mutually rewarding.

4. Be sensitive to keep feedback within appropriate company and personnel structure.

5. Incorporate the information you gather into your lesson plans.

6. Be sensitive around issues of immigration status. Learners may feel nervous talking about voting, social security numbers, etc.

7. Conduct your photo and interviewing sessions before your class starts and **continue** as the class progresses.

8. Pass on the tools of ethnography to the learners. Ethnographic analysis can help them learn more about the company and the world outside of work.

PHOTO TOPIC AGENDA

- **environmental location of company**
- **tools, raw product/materials, finished product, equipment**
- **utilization of tools and equipment**
- **product process**
- **function of, storing, and transporting of product**
- **departments, various positions and levels**
- **individual employee shots**

TIPS

1. Photographs should reflect the most undisturbed process and behavior.
2. Photographs should allow a variety of people over time to make their own deductions.
3. Photographs should be contextually complete.

REASONS TO USE PHOTOGRAPHS

1. To have an accurate and detailed record of the workplace
2. To identify the swiftly-changing technology and environment in the workplace
3. To allow for active participation and sharing of the research project
4. To create an image that can be used for later analysis and use in the classroom
5. To be able to understand the workplace concept as a whole

QUESTIONS FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

KNOWLEDGE **Level 1**	-What is...? -Where is...? -How would you describe...? -Can you list the three...?
COMPREHENSION **Level 2**	-How would you compare...? contrast...? -Can you explain what is happening...? -What is the main idea of...?
APPLICATION **Level 3**	-How would you use...? -What would result if...? -What items would you select to show...?
ANALYSIS **Level 4**	-What is the relationship between...? -Why do you think...? -What conclusions can you draw...?
SYNTHESIS **Level 5**	-How would you improve...? -Suppose you could____ what would you do...? -Can you predict the outcome if...? -How would you test...?
EVALUATION **Level 6**	-What is your opinion of...? -How would you prioritize...? -How would you evaluate...?

Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW
Question Types

I. Grand Tour Questions

The goal of the *grand tour question* is to find out the names of places and objects, to meet and/or hear about people, to observe and/or hear about events or activities, and to begin to understand how all of these elements interrelate. There are four types of grand tour questions: the general overview, the specific tour, the guided tour, and the task-related grand tour

Examples

A. *General Overview - Ask the informant to generalize, to discuss patterns of events*
   Could you describe a typical day on the job?
   Could you show me/tell me how you usually make a box?
B. *Specific Tour - Ask the informant about a specific incident or what he or she did on a certain day*
   Could you describe what happened at the recognition ceremony yesterday, from beginning to end?
   Tell me about the last time you used the crane.
C. *Guided Tour - Ask the informant for a tour of the workplace or to accompany him or her while doing a job*
   Could you show me around the plant?
   Could I go on a sales call with you?
D. *Task-Related Grand Tour - Ask the informant to perform a task to help you understand the context*
   Could you draw a flow chart of how the aluminum moves through the plant, from raw metal to the finished product?
   Could I watch you use the cutting machine and ask you questions about it afterwards?

II. Mini-Tour Questions

The purpose of a *mini-tour question* is the same as that of the grand tour question. The difference is that a mini-tour question deals with a much smaller aspect of experience. For example, if you said to an informant, "Tell me about a typical day at General Aluminum Products" and you heard the informant say again and again, "Then I run the coil through the annealing machine." You might then decide to ask a mini-tour question such as, "Describe what goes on when you run the coil through the annealing machine." The mini-tour question puts a magnifying glass on an activity or area that you think is important.

Adapted from *The Ethnographic Interview* by James Spradley 1979.

III. Example Questions

Example questions are usually woven throughout the ethnographic interview. An informant might say, "My supervisor gave me a hard time about OSHA regulations yesterday," and you might ask, "Can you give me an example of your supervisor giving you a hard time?" It is easy to assume that we share the same idea of what a hard time is, but surprising differences exist.

IV. Experience Questions

Open-ended *experience questions*, such as "Could you tell me about some experiences you've had working on the annealing machine?" are often used after a number of grand-tour and mini-tour questions. Experience questions are sometimes difficult for people to answer. They often prompt informants to tell about their unusual experiences, as opposed to the more typical experiences.

V. Native-Language Questions

If your informant is a non-native speaker of English, you speak that language, and it's appropriate to conduct the interview in this language, by all means, do so. However, what is meant by *native-language questions* here is more about using the terms that the informant uses to talk about the job. For example, if hot aluminum coils are cooled in a pressurized air containment cooling unit that your informant calls "the blower room," call it the blower room. Ask questions such as, "How long does it stay in the blower room?' The more you can get informants to talk about work the way they think about work, the better. This will give you a window into how they think about things, as well as how they talk about things, and will help establish rapport. There are three types of native-language questions: direct-language questions, hypothetical-interaction questions, and typical-sentence questions.

A. *Direct-Language Questions - Ask the informant how he or she would say something*
   What do you call it when you mismeasure a piece?
   How do you refer to your work area?

B. *Hypothetical-Interaction Questions - Set a scene for the informant. Describe the people involved (talking with a supervisor about a production problem) and try to get him or her to talk the way they would in that situation*
   If you were talking with a co-worker, would you say it that way?
   If I were on the factory floor, what kind of things would I hear co-workers saying to each other?
   How would you say that to your supervisor?

   C. *Typical-Sentence Questions - Ask directly for typical sentences or activities*
   What are some sentences that use the words blower room?

Adapted from *The Ethnographic Interview* by James Spradley 1979

ETHNOGRAPHIC ACTIVITY SHEET

Your name **Your informant** **Date** **Company** **Focus of interview**		
Questions	**Responses**	**Interpretations**

BENEFITS OF USING PHOTOGRAPHS AND INTERVIEWS IN WORKPLACE CLASSES

1. They establish communication between strangers.
2. They enlarge and strengthen data.
3. They can help to transition from unfamiliar to familiar context.
4. They offer a specific, concrete point of reference for the interviewee/participant : the workplace and the photograph.
5. They create a less stressful and anxious environment.
6. They place the interviewee/participant in a lead, active role.
7. They facilitate collection of data for those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the method.
8. They offer the opportunity for the interviewee/participant to demonstrate his/her expertise.
9. They allow for less inhibiting, more factual, precise responses (photos).
10. They provide information that can be maintined and utilized over a period of time.

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WORKPLACE EDUCATION VERSUS ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

	Workplace Education	Adult Basic Education
Instructor's Roles	• to become familiar with the company culture and products • to upgrade skills of the employees in response to employees' and employers' needs	• to become familiar with the characteristics of adult learners • to upgrade skills of the students in response to their needs and the communities' needs
Course Goals	• students and instructors customize goals to meet company and student education needs • course goals are based on functions to be performed in the workplace	• students select course and are placed by an entry level assessment • course goals focus on life skills and are often predetermined by educational level of student
Instructional Methods and Strategies	• are chosen based on the workplace environment, learner needs, and the curriculum	• are chosen based on the choices of students, instructors, and adult education departments
Assessment	• instructor creates assessments based on specific objectives through a variety of methods	• instructor usually employs standardized tests in combination with more subjective measures
Transfer of Learning	• emphasis is on transferring new skills to students' jobs, their personal lives, and their communities	• emphasis is on transferring new skills to students' personal lives and their communities
Texts and Resources	• primary texts and resources used are authentic to the workplace • employees' jobs determine the materials used in classroom instruction	• primary texts and resources focus on life skills for the adult student • students' needs determine the materials used in classroom instruction